

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4307

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING

FROM LAMBRAKIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AEMR, AFSP, OGEN, LE, SY, CASC

SUBJECT: GERMAN CONVOY JULY 4: TRIP REPORT

REF: BEIRUT 5874

1. FOLLOWING IS TRIP REPORT ON SUNDAY'S CONVOY WHICH WAS NOT SENT MONDAY, SINCE EMBASSY HERE WAS BUSY WITH BICENTENNIAL ACTIVITIES. FROM SECURITY POINT OF VIEW, TRIP WAS ENTIRELY UNEVENTFUL. I HEARD ONE RIFLE SHOT ONCE, WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THE SHORT SOMEBODY SAID HAD BEEN FIRED AT A CHECK-POINT IN SYRIAN-HELD TERRITORY, PERHAPS BY ACCIDENT. IN ANY CASE, CONVOY REACHED LEBANESE-SYRIAN FRONTIER FIVE HOURS AND FIFTEEN MINUTES AFTER DEPARTURE FROM RIVEIRA HOTLE, BEIRUT. AS I CLOCKED IT, CONVOY DEPARTED RIVEIRA 0815 LOCAL WITH PLO RED-BERET SECURITY ESCORT, INCLUDING ONE OR TWO POINT CARS AND TWO OR THREE RED TRUCKS OF LPO ARMED PERSONNEL SPACED THROUGH CONVOY. WE REACHED JIYE APPROXIMATELY THIRTY MINUTES AFTER DEPARTURE, RAIMTHA FORTY-FIVE MINUTES AFTER, AND NABATIAH TWO HOURS AFTER DEPARTURE.

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CONVOY CRAWLED THROUGH NABATIAH MARKET PLACE DUE HEAVY

CONGESTION OF TRAFFIC, TOOK A BREAK SOMEWHERE BETWEEN NABATIAH AND MARJAYOUN, SHORTLY AFTER WHICH PLO ESCORT DROPPED OFF. THIS WAS APPROXIMATELY TWO AND ONE-HALF HOURS AFTER DEPARTURE. PLO'S MAJOR AHMAD WAS AGAIN IN COMMAND AND WAVED HIS GOODBYES.

2. AT ENTRANCE TO MARJAYOUN, LONGEST DELAY OF TRIP OCCURRED WHILE GERMAN CONVOY LEADER WENT UP AHEAD TO (SYRIAN OR LEBANESE) MILITARY HEADQUARTERS TO GET CLEARANCE. CONSIDERABLE TRAFFIC CONGESTION OCCURRED, BUT ROAD WAS WIDE THERE AND CONVOY GOT UNDERWAY WITH MINIMUM OF DIS-ORGANIZATION. WE NEVER STOPPED MORE THAN FEW MINUTES AT ANY OTHER CHECKPOINT, THOUGH THESE CHECKPOINTS WERE PLENTIFUL, MANNED BY SOLDIERS IN KHAKIS WHO LOOKED SYRIAN RATHER THAN LEBANESE.

3. AT SMALL MOUNTAIN POINT FARAH DJOUBB, NOTED THREE OR FOUR SYRIAN TANKS DUG-IN ON BOTH SIDES OF ROAD, WITH SMALL DETAIL OF SYRIAN ARMY. TWO LEADED TANK TRANSPORTERS WERE GOING TOWARDS THAT POINT AS WE LEFT IT. NEVER NOTICED ANY MORE SYRIAN ARMOR ON THE ROAD. ARRIVED LEBANESE SIDE OF FRONTIER 1330 LOCAL, AND CONTINUED AFTER BRIEF STOP TO SYRIAN SIDE OF FRONTIER SINCE NO LEBANESE FORMALITIES WERE NECESSARY. (THIS MAY NOT BE CASE IN ALL FUTURE CONVOYS).

4. ROAD WAS PAVED MOST OF WAY AND QUITE GOOD. SOME DEEP HOLES AFTER AMRJAYOUN (POSSIBLY CAUSED BY ARTILLERY OF MINING) BUT LARGE TRUCKS WERE USING THE ROAD, AND I BELIEVE BUSES OR TRUCKS COULD STRADDLE THOSE POINTS. THERE ARE NO VERY DIFFICULT CLIMBS OR VERY NARROW POINTS. THUS, I BELIEVE, ROAD COULD BE USED FOR BUS AS WELL AS TRUCK TRAFFIC.

5. DELAY OF ABOUT TWO HOURS OCCURRED AT SYRIAN FRONTIER WHILE I MADE SURE AMERICAN CITIZENS AND AID PAKISTANI-BANGLADESH STUDENTS CLEARED PASSPORT CHECK AND CAR ENTRY FORMALITIES. SCENE WAS INDESCRIBABLY DEMORALIZING UPON ARRIVAL IN THAT ENTIRE ROAD BLOCKED BY OTHER VEHICLES AND, BECAUSE OF CONVOY'S UNEXPECTEDLY EARLY ARRIVAL, GERMAN

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AND U.S. EMBASSY OFFICIALS FROM DAMASCUS HAD NOT GOTTEN THERE. IN FACT, US EMBOFF AND FSL WHO HAD MET EARLIER MEA CONVOY WITH BURNED AMERICAN PILOTS AND FACILITATED THEIR TRAVEL TO DAMASCUS AIRPORT WERE THEN ENROUTE BACK TO BORDER. (BELIEVE ADDRESSEES ARE AWARE THAT CONVOY TOOK SHORTER ROUTE THROUGH MORE DANGEROUS TERRAIN AND WAS GIVEN ROUGHER TREATMENT, WITH ONE MEA OFFICIAL BEING DETAINED SOMEWHERE ALONG THE ROUTE.) WITH ASSISTANCE OF DAMASCUS EMBASSY LOCAL CLEARING THE CARS,

HOWEVER, AND FUND OF EXPERIENCE GERMANY CONVOY LEADER POSSESSED, WE MANAGED TO COMPLETE CLEARANCE IN REASONABLE TIME.

6. FOR BENEFIT OF FUTURE CONVOYS, BELIEVE IT WORTH NOTING FOLLOWING PARTICULARS ABOUT SYRIAN ENTRY POINT. FIRST, CONVOY LEADER AND/OR SENIOR AMERICAN SHOULD MAKE EFFORT TO GET CLEARANCE OF ALL PASSPORTS ON CONVOY AS A GROUP, RATHER THAN LETTING INDIVIDUALS FIGHT THEIR WAY THROUGH VERY DISORGANIZED "LINES." FIRST BUILDING ON THE RIGHT AS CARS ARRIVE IS IMMIGRATION. ENTRY APPLICATIONS MUST BE PICKED UP FROM IMMIGRATION OFFICER AND FILLED OUT BY INDIVIDUALS BEFORE PASSPORTS ARE PRESENTED. CONVOY LEADER SHOULD GO TO OFFICE AT FAR LEFT INSIDE BUILDING WHERE CHIEF IMMIGRATION SUPERVISOR SITS. IN THIS CASE, IT WAS CAPTAIN LUFID SOLAHI, BUT I UNDERSTAND THEY CHANGE. (ONE OF THEM EVEN OFFERS TEA, GERMAN EMBASSY TOLD ME.) WITH PROPER INTRODUCTION AND TREATMENT, THIS CAPTAIN CAN FACILITATE CLEARANCE BY AT LEAST AN HOUR OR MORE. DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS GET PREFERENCE, BUT THAT DOES NOT HELP AS FAR AS RESPONSIBILITY FOR GETTING ALL AMERICAN TRAVELERS THROUGH IS CONCERNED. NO CHARGE FOR DIPLOMATIC VISAS. REGULAR U.S. PASSPORTS PAY TEN SYRIAN POUNDS FOR THREE-DAY TRANSIT VISA OR TWENTY-SIX SYRIAN POUNDS FOR ENTRY VISA. NO CHARGE FOR PAKISTANI PASSPORTS AND BANGLADESH TRAVELERS PAID ONLY FIVE SYRIAN POUNDS PER TRANSIT VISA.

7. VEHICLE FORMALITIES ARE CONDUCTED AT CUSTOMS OFFICE FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD (WHICH MAY NOT BE APPROACHABLE BY CAR, IF CONGESTION IS AS GREAT AS IT WAS SUNDAY).

THERE ARE SAID TO BE LITTLE BOYS WHO ASSIST IN CLEARANCE. SUGGEST THAT EVERY EFFORT BE MADE TO HAVE ASSISTANCE OF DAMASCUS LOCAL, AS WE DID, WHO CAN AT LEAST CONFIDENTIAL

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STEER PRIVATE AMERICANS IN RIGHT DIRECTION AS WELL AS CLEARING OFFICIAL VEHICLES. THERE IS A SMALL CHARGE FOR VEHICLE CLEARANCE, IN ADDITION TO FIFTEEN SYRIAN POUNDS FOR SHORT-TERM INSURANCE PER CAR. LEBANESE REGISTRATION DOCUMENT IS A REQUIREMENT RPT REQUIREMENT. (EMBASSY LOCAL WAS ABLE CLEAR ONE OFFICIAL VEHICLE, HOWEVER, WITHOUT SUCH DOCUMENT BY COPYING CHASSIS NUMBER AND OTHER INFORMATION. SUGGEST THIS PROCEDURE NOT BE RELIED ON WITH NON-OFFICIAL VEHICLES, THOUGH). ONCE FORMALITIES ARE COMPLETED, IT MAY REQUIRE SOME INGENUITY AND ASSISTANCE FROM LOCAL SYRIAN AUTHORITIES TO GET VEHICLES PHYSICALLY THROUGH THE BORDER GHOST. THAT SEEMS TO HAVE WORKED REASONABLY WELL ON SUNDAY, SINCE MOST PEOPLE HAD BETTER PART OF TWO HOURS IN WHICH TO DO THIS. ONCE CLEARED, IT IS A FORTY-FIVE MINUTE DRIVE TO DAMASCUS.

8. GERMAN CONVOY LEADERS NOTIFIED EVERYONE CONVOY WAS ONLY AS FAR AS FRONTIER, IMPLYING ENTRY INTO SYRIA WAS INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY. SUGGEST U.S. OFFICIALS TAKE SIMILAR TACK, BUT (AS DID GERMANS) TRY TO FACILITATE ENTRANCE OF PRIVATE AMERICANS AND LEBANESE TRAVELING WITH THEM, SINCE LEBANESE IN PARTICULARL WILL HAVE MUCH LONGER WAIT OTHERWISE. I EXPRESSED USG THANKS TO GERMAN AMBASSADOR VON PACHEBEL AND HIS FIRST SECRETARY FOR THEIR VERY EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP OF CONVOY. GERMAN AMBASSADOR ASKED ME TO RELAY TO EMBASSY BEIRUT HIS GRATITUDE FOR GENEROUS AND EFFICIENT ASSISTANCE BY U.S. EMBASSY STAFF INORGANIZING DEPARTURE FORMALITIES IN BEIRUT. THERE WAS NO BRITISH OR OTHER OFFICIAL EMBASSY PRESENCE ON CONVOY OR AT SYRIAN ENTRY POINT (THOUGH ONE BRITISH EMBOFF WAS TRAVELING IN IT). ALL IN ALL, IT WAS A HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY FOR CONVOY PARTICIPANTS. OUR WARM WISHES TO BEIRUT COLLEAGUES. MURPHY

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